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SUBJECT: UPDATES ON THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL DEFENSE FORCE

Classified By: CONSUL GENERAL A MAYBERRY: REASONS 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) On February 19, Poloff met with Dr. Gerard Koornhof an ANC Member of Parliament serving on the Portfolio Committee on Defense. Koornhof told Poloff that the current spending on defense is 1.2 percent of South Africa,s gross domestic product (GDP), noting that South Africa,s defense spending is the lowest level in the world. However, he said that the Portfolio Committee on Defense wants to increase the spending to 1.7 percent of the country,s GDP within the next four years, although it could be difficult since there is only one budget for the whole of South Africa and military spending must compete against socio-economic concerns. This 0.5 percent raise in defense spending would not include money needed to modernize the SA Army. Defense equipment and systems need to be replaced and modernized, said Koornhof. He added that he has no idea how much this will cost because it depends on whether the upgrades are done on a short term, medium term or long term basis.

¶2. (C) Koornhof explained that the mandate of the South African National Defense Force (SANDF) is delineated in the South African Constitution, which sets forth the need to have a strong military. The main thrust of the military said Koornhof is South Africa,s peace-keeping operations on the continent. He continued by saying that the SAG needs to ensure peace and stability in the region so that the problems other countries are experiencing do not flow down to South Africa. He believes the SA military is overstretched since SA currently has 3000 soldiers deployed in foreign peace keeping operations out of a total of 75,000 personnel in all branches of the defense force. Koornhof said, the country can cope with deploying 3000 soldiers, but would not be able to deploy any more right now. He believes the SANDF needs more capacity in order to keep up with the demand. He said for every 3000 soldiers deployed, the SANDF needs another 3000 in reserve and a second 3000 in training. However, he did say that the SAG would continue to review all requests for South African peace keepers.

¶3. (C) Koornhof also discussed the SANDF,s military skills development system. Currently, five to ten thousand soldiers are being recruited for the program and it is oversubscribed. He also said that many of the current soldiers are between thirty and forty years old with no rank and that SANDF needs new, younger soldiers who can fight. The SAG has recently announced a new training program for these older soldiers to assist them in finding jobs when they leave the military.

¶4. (C) "Brain-drain" is also a big problem for the SANDF, especially for specialist jobs such as pilots, engineers, mechanics, aviation technicians and navy divers, said Koornhof. The SAG is considering linking training time to the recruitment contract so that a soldier will be obligated to serve in the military for at least the same amount of time of his training. Furthermore, the Portfolio Committee on Defense has recommended to the Minister of Defense that SANDF should offer special incentives in order to recruit people who already have specialized skills that the military needs.

15. (C) Comment. The SANDF plays a critical role in the life and policy goals of the SAG, especially as it regards the foreign policy priority to contribute to African conflict resolution. Many observers recognize that the SANDF needs additional resources; but it is unclear if those resources will be made available once the new government is elected in Qwill be made available once the new government is elected in April. Under the ANC-led government headed by former president Thabo Mbeki, military spending was not increased. The new leaders of the ANC have not publicly indicated any interest in increasing the budget of the military. The question therefore remains: Will a new ANC government led by ANC President Jacob Zuma (who will likely be the next President of SA), agree to increase the defense budget to at least the 1.7 percent recommended by Koornhof? End comment.
MAYBERRY